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OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST BATTALION, 318TH INFANTRY (80TH INF. DIV.),
IN THE CAPTURE OF THE CITY OF KASSEL, GERMANY, 1-4 APRIL, 1945.
(CENTRAL EUROPE CAMPAIGN)

(Personal experience of a Battalion Executive Officer)

Type of operation described: BATTALION IN THE ATTACK

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 1st Battalion, 318th Infantry, 80th Infantry Division, during the period 1-4 April, 1945. During that period of time, the 80th Infantry Division, under the command of Maj. Gen. Horace L. McBride, fought for and captured the City of Kassel, Germany.

In order to orient the reader of this monograph properly, it will be necessary to look at a map of Central Europe (Map A) and see where Kassel is situated and why it was of great importance to the Allied High Command.

Kassel is a city of over 200,000 population (1939 census) and is approximately 124 miles northeast of Frankfurt-on-Main. It is situated on both sides of the Fulda River in hilly and well-wooded country. (1)

The City of Kassel was an important communications and supply center, and prior to the war had such industries as iron works, manufacture of railway carriages, manufacture of scientific instruments, brewing and agriculture. More recently the Germans made and assembled their famous Tiger Royal Tanks mounted with 88mm high velocity muzzle-break guns in Kassel. (2)

One of the principal places of interest in the city is the park which lies in the southern part of the city along the west bank of the Fulda River. In certain parts of the park, and especially from the Octagon, observation is very good in all directions. During the battle for the city, the Germans used positions in this park as vantage points from which to observe and direct artillery fire on our advancing troops.

(1) A-8; (2) A-7

Since the Germans had just suffered the loss of their great industrial areas of the Ruhr and Silesia, the area around Kassel was the richest left to the German High Command. (3)

In order to isolate this particular area and to bring the war to a close as quickly as possible, there were three courses of action open to Gen. Eisenhower:

"(1) An advance south down the Danube valley, which would isolate the "National Redoubt" and lead to a junction with Soviet forces in Austria; (2) an advance across the plains of northern Germany to secure the important ports, and to cut off Holland, Denmark, and Norway; and (3) a central drive with the line Kassel-Leipzig as its axis.

"Berlin could be reached by either the central or northern route, but aside from the psychological effect of its capture, it no longer was considered an important strategic objective. If German resistance were to continue to disintegrate, simultaneous Allied advances along all three strategic routes might achieve the desired results. However, in the end the decision was made to concentrate on a powerful drive by the 12th Army Group along the Kassel-Leipzig axis, which, of course, would be supported by the other two Army Groups.

"The following major factors influenced this decision:

"1. This route would take us through the German Army's center, which had already been pierced and disrupted.

"2. The terrain between Kassel and Leipzig offered no major river obstacle, but rather was a plateau suitable for the rapid movement of armor. In contrast, the plains of northern Germany were intersected by many waterways which, with the bridges destroyed, would prevent rapid movement - the essence of the Allied plan.

(3) A-3, p. 84

"3. The 12th Army Group not only was in the best position to drive eastward through the gap in the enemy's front, but could be reinforced more quickly by divisions released from the Ruhr operation.

"4. If successful, the advance along the central route would lead to the capture of the last important industrial area in Germany, the Leipzig-Chemnitz area, and probably to an earlier junction with the Russians. It would split the country in half, which would be more advantageous than cutting off either the northern or southern part." (4)

THE ENEMY SITUATION

It was anticipated that the defenders of Kassel, estimated to number approximately 7,000 troops hastily thrown together into battle groups, would wage a stubborn fight for this important communications and supply center. (5)

Opposing the 80th Infantry Division in this sector were elements of the German 166th and 365th Infantry Divisions and numerous miscellaneous units, including replacement anti-aircraft and Landesschuetzen Battalions. Considerable forces of tanks, concentrated near Kassel, were supporting these units. (6)

THE DISPOSITIONS AND GENERAL PLAN

On 1 April the 80th Division, less 318th Infantry, was following the 6th Armored Division in the vicinity south of Kassel. The 318th Infantry was attached to the 6th Armored Division. (7)

The 6th Armored Division had moved from Frankfurt in two parallel columns, generally astride the autobahn which runs north and east from Frankfurt. During this move the 6th Armored Division had encountered only

(4) A-4, p. 44-45; (5) A-2, p. 10; (6) A-1, p. 1; (7) A-1, p. 1.

sporadic resistance along the way, and the job of the infantry had been to mop-up behind this armored spearhead.

Field Message Number 3 was issued by 80th Division at 1200 on 1 April, and it directed that the 318th Infantry revert immediately to Division control, and that the 80th Division would pass through the 6th Armored Division in a direct assault on the City of Kassel. The attack was to be launched on a line east of Fritzlar to the Fulda River in the vicinity of Malsfeld. (8)

The 318th Infantry was to be on the left of the Division zone with the objective of taking the City of Kassel. The 319th Infantry was to be on the right with the mission of taking the hills to the east of Kassel and to cut off any German elements endeavoring to retreat to the east or north-east. The 317th Infantry, in Division Reserve, was to follow the 318th Infantry. The 80th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop was to be on the left flank, reconnoitering to the north and maintaining contact with elements of the 1st Army on our left. The 633rd AAA (mobile) Battalion, 702nd Tank Battalion, and the 811th Tank Battalion (SP) were attached to 80th Division and were in direct support. (9)

At the time this Field Message was issued, the 317th, 318th and 319th Infantry Regiments were in assembly areas in the vicinity of Homberg, a town about 20 miles south of Kassel. (10)

Following receipt of Field Message Number 3, Col. James S. Lockett, Commanding Officer of 318th Infantry, issued his attack order to the assembled Battalion Commanders, Special Staff Officers, and commanders of supporting units. The order was to attack Kassel from the south with the 1st and 2nd Battalions abreast, 1st Battalion on the right. The 3rd Battalion was to be in Regimental Reserve and was to follow the 1st Battalion at 1,000 yards.

(8) A-1, p. 1; (9) A-1, p. 1; (10) Personal knowledge.

As soon as the two leading Battalions neared Kassel from the south, the 2nd Battalion was to swing to the west and move around the edge of the city to establish road blocks on the roads leading out of Kassel to the north. (11)

After receiving the Regimental attack order, the Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. Chas. F. Gaking, assembled his subordinate commanders and issued the Battalion attack order, pertinent parts of which were as follows:

The 1st Battalion was to attack with Companies B and C abreast, Company C on the right, and seize that part of the city in its zone. The line of departure, company zones, direction of attack, location of command posts, etc., were clearly marked on an overlay which was issued to the assembled group.

Company C with one platoon of heavy machine guns attached was to attack on the right of the 1st Battalion zone from the vicinity of some isolated farm buildings near the river. After our Battalion secured the little village of Ndr Vorschutz, just north of the departure positions, Company C was to extend its left flank across the road.

Company B with one platoon of heavy machine guns attached was to extend Company C's left flank 200 yards to the west and continue to the north in its zone of action.

Company A was designated as Battalion Reserve and was to follow Company B at 300 yards, prepared to maneuver to the left if a threat to that flank presented itself. The right flank of the Battalion was protected by the river.

The 81mm Mortar Platoon was to take positions on the left of the road near the woods. The mortars were to be set up and fired in battery under Battalion control. An observer with a SCR 300 radio was to be with each attacking company.

(11) A-6

The Antitank Platoon was to remain in position, prepared to protect the Battalion in event of a counterattack from the north or northwest.

The Tank Destroyer Platoon was to take positions to the south of Ndr Vorschutz and support the advance of the Battalion.

The time of attack was to be 1700 on 1 April, 1945. (12)

THE ACTION - 1ST DAY

As soon as Lt. Col. Gaking had issued his Battalion attack order, he started on a reconnaissance along some of the roads south of Kassel. During this reconnaissance, final coordination was made with adjacent and supporting units. Although no mention has been made of supporting artillery fire, it played an important part in the battle, as later events will show. There was an Artillery Liaison Officer with the Battalion at all times.

All units were in position prior to jump-off time. Radios were checked, and it was decided to use the SCR 300 radio as the principal means of communication unless the situation became stabilized; in which case, wire lines were to be laid to company command posts by the Communications Platoon. (13)

Promptly at 1700, the 81mm mortars started firing on the little village of Ndr Vorschutz just north of our line of departure. Company C on the right and Company B on the left started moving forward. There was a small hill between the line of departure and the little village, and this hill tended to obscure their movements. In about half an hour the 1st Battalion had reached the village and, upon arriving, found it unoccupied. The outguards had apparently withdrawn north into Oberzwehren.

Many German soldiers had been seen in the village, and stiff opposition had been expected as the Battalion entered it. The fact that the village was

(12) A-6 and Personal knowledge; (13) Personal knowledge

unoccupied seemed to stimulate and give confidence to the men in the lead companies, so the attack was continued without delay.

By 2400, without too much opposition, our 1st Battalion had reached the town of Oberzwehren, where forward movement was stopped for the night. (14)

The 2nd Battalion, 318th Infantry, had moved rapidly from the vicinity of Homberg during the day, and by 1715 the leading elements were in the woods north of Gudensberg. Shortly after midnight the town of Crossenrite was cleared, and the Battalion was held up for the night. (15)

The 3rd Battalion, 318th Infantry, in Regimental Reserve, was following the 1st Battalion and had passed through Ndr Vorschutz on the way to Hertingshausen when it was halted for the night. (16)

The 317th Infantry, in Division Reserve near Leimfeld, moved in the late afternoon north towards Gudensberg and Maden, where it remained for the night. (17)

The 319th Infantry, with the objective of crossing the Fulda River and advancing northeast along the east bank of the river, had crossed just prior to darkness and was nearing the town of Dornhagen when it was halted for the night. (18)

THE ACTION - 2ND DAY

Early on the morning of 2 April, the 1st Battalion, from its positions in and around Oberzwehren, started to advance in column of companies, Company C leading, and by 0300 was in Niederzwehren.

At about 0400, the leading elements of the Battalion were just approaching the railroad crossing in Niederzwehren when the scouts were fired on by small arms fire. This firing halted the Battalion, and a conference was held with the company commanders. The situation was explained to the Battalion Commander, and he gave the order to continue the advance. Before the Battalion

(14) Personal knowledge; (15) A-1, p. 2; (16) A-1, p. 2; (17) A-1, p. 2;
(18) A-1, p. 2.

could get started, however, the Regimental Executive Officer arrived at the forward Battalion Command Post with new instructions from Regiment. These instructions called for the 3rd Battalion, which had been following the 1st Battalion, to swing off just south of the railroad and hit the main part of town from the southwest in a flanking and encircling movement.

The 1st Battalion was to continue the advance to the north in column of companies since the 3rd Battalion would then be protecting our left flank.

The Battalion was to move out at 0430, with Company C in the lead, followed by Company A at 300 yards, and with Company B in Battalion Reserve. (19)

In the meantime, the 1st Battalion Aid Station and a few command vehicles from the 1st and 3rd Battalions had moved forward and were located in the vicinity of the warehouses and barracks at Oberzwehren.

The Tank Destroyer Platoon, the 81mm Mortar Platoon and the Battalion Antitank Platoon were in mobile positions in this same general locality. (20)

The Battalion started out at 0430 and was immediately stopped again, this time by "Bazooka" as well as small arms fire coming from the area just beyond the railroad. Again the order was given to push ahead, and by daylight the Battalion had advanced to the group of factory buildings between the two sets of railroad tracks.

The "Bazooka" and small arms fire at the railroad had cost the Battalion at least a dozen casualties. (21)

As the Battalion approached the factory buildings between the two sets of railroad tracks, it was necessary to change the formation from a column of companies to a formation of two companies abreast, as it was getting light and also in order to cover the entire area assigned to the Battalion. Company C

(19) Personal knowledge; (20) A-6; (21) A-6.

was to be on the right and Company B on the left, with Company A in Battalion Reserve.

The Tank Destroyers, seven in number, were following closely behind the Battalion. They were on the road moving in a single column, when they were suddenly fired on by enemy tanks. The Germans were launching a coordinated counterattack with about a dozen tanks supported by infantry. Six of these tanks were "Tiger Royals", and in a brisk fire fight they disabled and set fire to six of our Tank Destroyers. This left us with no direct supporting armor, as the only Tank Destroyer left was a command vehicle, and it had withdrawn during the engagement. (22)

Meanwhile, as soon as the German tanks had appeared, the leading elements of Company C had taken refuge in the nearby factory buildings. As the tanks continued south towards Niedierzwehren, these elements came out of the buildings and engaged the accompanying German infantrymen in a fire fight. Company C captured and killed approximately 100 German soldiers in this encounter and completely separated the infantry from the tanks. (23)

The enemy tanks were still moving south along the main road, and as they passed the railroad they began to fan out in an attempt to cover a wider frontage. They apparently were unaware of the fact that their infantrymen were no longer in close support behind them.

This armored counterattack showed little sign of letting up, and the tanks were approaching the barracks in Oberzwehren where the Aid Station and forward Command Post were located and where some of our Battalion vehicles were parked. As these enemy tanks approached, the Battalion Commander gave the order for the displacement to the rear of the Battalion Aid Station and all vehicles. (24)

When the Tank Destroyers were knocked out, Regimental Headquarters was promptly notified, and a request for additional armor support was made to help break up this counterattack. No support was available, however, as

(22) Personal knowledge; (23) A-6; (24) A-6.

three of the disabled vehicles were supposed to have been attached to the 3rd Battalion, and those attached to 2nd Battalion were not available to us. (25)

As the leading tank approached, the Battalion Antitank gun nearest the road opened fire and fired six rounds before it was jammed by a defective shell casing. The gunner, in an attempt to seat the round, picked up another round from the ammunition dump and started hammering on the defective round stuck in the breech. The point of the projectile hit the primer of the jammed round, causing a premature explosion. Since the breech was not fully closed, the full impact of the exploding round was expended to the rear, full in the face of the gunner, killing him instantly and disabling the gun. (26)

The approaching enemy tanks opened fire on our remaining two Battalion Antitank guns and disabled both with direct hits. These three guns had been set up around the barracks as protection for the command group and mortar crews which were in that vicinity. (27)

Since the German tanks were still advancing and were beginning to flank the barracks buildings, the Battalion Commander, his Heavy Weapons Company Commander, the 81mm Platoon Leader, and about 15 men from the Mortar Platoon were forced to take cover in the basement of the southernmost building.

As the tanks approached to within 50 yards of the building, the order was given to open fire with all available weapons. Fortunately, one member of the trapped group had a rocket launcher, commonly called a "Bazooka", with four rounds of ammunition. Three rounds were fired in rapid succession at the advancing tanks along with M1 rifle and carbine fire from other members of the group. The firing seemed to have no damaging effect on the tanks other than to keep them buttoned up. However, a little later, we observed one of the Tiger Royals being towed by another tank, and this led us to

(25) Personal knowledge; (26) A-6; (27) Personal knowledge

believe that one of the "Bazooka" rounds had damaged the driving sprocket of the German tank. (28)

While this fight was going on radio contact with the forward Command Post was lost, and consequently we were unaware of the plight of the Battalion Commander and his command group in the barracks building. A runner came back, and he informed us that he was the only person left up front. He said the rest of the command group, including the Battalion Commander, had been trapped in the basement of the building by the attacking tanks and were probably all captured or killed by that time.

It had taken the runner about twenty minutes to reach the rear Command Post, and during that time we had no communication with the forward elements. Arrangements were made to go forward immediately to locate the Battalion Commander, if possible, and to re-establish communication; but before this could be effected, radio contact was regained with the forward command group. (29)

The Battalion Commander reported that the situation was not as critical as the runner had pictured it. The tanks were still counterattacking to the south towards the town of Altenbauna; and since we had no Tank Destroyer support, the Battalion Commander ordered that a request for help from the Division Medium Artillery be made immediately. The Artillery Liaison Officer was able to direct 155mm artillery fire onto the tank positions, and two direct hits were scored on the tanks.

With the help of the 317th Infantry this counterattack was broken up, and by 1500 the 1st Battalion was reorganized and ready to move forward again. (30)

The Germans launched another counterattack about 1600, this time with Mark V and Mark VI tanks supported by infantry riding in half-tracks. This counterattack was coming from our left front and was penetrating our lines

(28) A-6; (29) Personal knowledge; (30) A-1, p. 5.

between the 1st and 3rd Battalions. Again Division Artillery had to be called upon to help break up this second counterattack. The Artillery and regimental supporting weapons succeeded in separating the half-tracks from the Mark V and Mark VI tanks, and these tanks soon withdrew into the center of town. (31)

The rest of the afternoon and night were more or less uneventful. Resistance had been extremely severe during the day, and the Battalion had been subjected to two separate tank attacks as well as stubborn defense by groups of German soldiers in house-to-house fighting.

At midnight, the 1st Battalion was still in the area between the two sets of railroad tracks shown on the map. (Map B) During the day of 2 April our Battalion had captured almost 200 prisoners, and these prisoners had been taken in small groups. The fact that the Battalion Antitank Platoon and the supporting Tank Destroyer Platoon had been knocked out had slowed our progress during the day. (32)

The 2nd Battalion, 318th Infantry, had moved from Crossenrite through Altenritte northwest to the high ground west of Kassel, and at the close of day on 2 April was reorganizing on the northwestern outskirts of the city in order to assault from that direction. (33)

The 3rd Battalion, 318th Infantry, initially in Regimental Reserve, had been called upon to help break up the tank-infantry counterattack. It had been committed in the gap between 1st and 2nd Battalions and had fought generally on the southwestern outskirts of Kassel during the day. By midnight, the 3rd Battalion had entered the railroad yards and was ready to continue the attack to the north and east into Kassel. (34)

The 317th Infantry, in Division Reserve near Maden, had committed one Battalion to support the 318th Infantry against the enemy counterattack of tanks and infantry. All of the available tanks and Tank Destroyers had

(31) A-6 and Personal knowledge; (32) A-6; (33) A-1, p. 4; (34) A-1, p. 4.

been used to help stem the counterattacks. By midnight, the 317th Infantry had advanced to the northwest of the city. (35)

The 319th Infantry, on our right, was moving north along the east bank of the Fulda River, and had captured several towns in its zone of advance, including Dornhagen, Bergshausen, Wellerode, Cuxhagen and Vollmarshausen. (36)

THE ACTION - 3RD DAY

At 0500 the 1st Battalion again launched its attack to the north with two companies abreast, Company C on the right side of the road and Company B on the left of the road. As the Battalion reached the second railroad, it was stopped by sniper fire coming from the railroad embankment. The railroad at that point passed over Frankfurterstrasse and was about 15 feet higher than the street. The concrete underpass was quite narrow, and the Germans had emplaced a self-propelled antitank gun to guard it. Movement was very difficult. The antitank gun was firing point-blank fire down the road, and the high railroad embankment was protected by Germans in dug-in positions on the reverse side of the railroad.

We suffered quite a few casualties from German hand grenades along this railroad. They would lob them over from the far side of the tracks whenever any of our men neared the railroad or attempted to cross it. (37)

After several hours of futile efforts to get over this barrier, the Battalion Commander decided on a new plan of maneuver.

Regiment was beginning to put pressure on us to move forward without delay. The 2nd and 3rd Battalions were reporting progress in their zones of action, and it was difficult for Regiment to understand why the 1st Battalion was not moving faster.

The new plan was to withdraw Company B from the line and send it and

(35) A-1, p. 5; (36) A-1, p. 5; (37) Personal knowledge.

Company A around to the left in an attempt to cross the railroad in the vicinity of the 3rd Battalion positions and to work southeast, thereby getting in behind the enemy forces holding up our advance. It was hoped that the gun protecting the underpass could be overrun from the flank or rear. Company C was to extend its left flank across the Frankfurterstrasse and occupy the zone vacated by Company B. This company was to constitute the holding force to engage the enemy while the maneuvering force of two companies moved around to the flank. (38)

This plan was working nicely, and by dark Companies A and B were beginning to close in towards the big group of barracks north of the railroad in our zone of advance. There were several groups of warehouses and barracks in the southern part of Kassel, and all of them were being used by the Germans as strong points. That probably accounted for the fact that our 1st Battalion was taking more prisoners than the other two Battalions and was having the greatest difficulty in advancing.

At about 1700 Company C was able to break over the railroad from the south and to make contact with Company A on the north of the railroad tracks. However, no contact could be made with Company B, because the Company Commander had run into trouble and had turned off his radio.

As soon as it became dark, the Battalion was halted and efforts were made to locate Company B. When they last reported their location by radio, they were in the general vicinity of the barracks. This entire section was still full of Germans, who were stubbornly resisting from building to building, which made it impossible to send out a large patrol to try to locate Company B. (39)

That was the situation at midnight on 3 April. The 1st Battalion had managed to fight its way forward across the railroad and into the southern edge of the park. Our men were beginning to show need for sleep and rest, but the Division order was to take Kassel with all possible haste. At mid-

(38) A-6; (39) A-6 and Personal knowledge.

night, fighting continued in the barracks area and southern part of the park. (40)

The 2nd Battalion, 318th Infantry, was continuing its assault on Kassel from the west and northwest. During the day the 2nd Battalion had reached the Fulda River near the center of the city and had seized the northern part of the city. This prevented any reinforcements from arriving or remnants from escaping to the north. (41)

The 3rd Battalion, 318th Infantry, had penetrated well into the western part of the city, and by midnight was advancing along the two main avenues in the old part of Kassel, the Wilhelmshohenstrasse and the Hohenzollernstrasse. They were gradually pushing the Germans towards the Fulda River and into the path of our 1st Battalion. (42)

The 317th Infantry during the day continued to mop-up pockets of resistance to the west and northwest of Kassel while protecting the left flank of the Division. They were attempting to encircle Kassel from the north and contact elements of the 319th Infantry along the Fulda River. (43)

The 319th Infantry had repulsed a counterattack supported by tanks and infantry in its advance north along the east bank of the Fulda River. During the day they had captured a large airplane factory and had established numerous road blocks to protect the right flank of the Division. The 80th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop had been attached to the 319th Infantry for flank protection. (44)

THE ACTION - 4TH DAY

The Division plan of attack was working well at the beginning of the fourth day of fighting. The Germans were being squeezed into the east end of Kassel. That is the old part of the city, and it is separated from the rest of the city by a high rock cliff. The cliff extends along the northern

(40) A-6 and Personal knowledge; (41) A-1, p. 7; (42) A-1, p. 7; (43) A-1, p. 6; (44) A-1, p. 8.

part of the park to the river and bends back to the west as far as the Kirchditmold railroad station. The highest part is along the park, at which point it is about 30 feet high. In order to get up to the old part of the city from the park area, it is necessary to climb the concrete steps placed at intervals in the retaining wall of the cliff.

There was a large air-raid shelter in the cliff as well as an underground hospital, and hundreds of German civilians and soldiers had taken refuge in the shelters from the artillery fire of the Americans. (45)

An interesting item of news heard during 3 April was the announcement over the Munich radio at 1200 that Kassel had surrendered to the Americans. However, it was almost 25 hours later before Kassel officially surrendered to the 318th Infantry. (46)

During the night and early morning, the 1st Battalion was engaged in clearing the park area of Germans, and by daylight was advancing north into the center of the city. The Battalion was moving with two companies abreast. Company C was on the right and was responsible for the entire park, while Company A was responsible for the area to the left of the road.

Company B was located during the night in buildings adjacent to our zone of advance. They had become surrounded by Germans, and had been so close to them that the Company Commander had decided to turn his radio off for fear of being detected. As the Battalion moved forward to where Company B was to rejoin, it was met by a column of 500 German soldiers guarded by men from Company B. These 500 Germans were surrendering to our 1st Battalion in a group; and when asked why 500 men had surrendered to a company of 150 men, the Company Commander reported that the Germans had seen the rest of the Battalion moving forward and had voluntarily given themselves up.

The 1st Battalion was intact again, and in the reorganization, Company B was put in Battalion Reserve, and was to be used to mop-up behind the

(45) A-7 and Personal knowledge; (46) Personal knowledge.

advancing elements. (47)

THE SURRENDER

The attack began to move faster after the Battalion passed the warehouse and barracks area and entered the park. It was apparent by then that the battle for Kassel was almost at an end. All three Battalions were converging on the air-raid shelter that housed the Headquarters of the Germans defending the city. (48)

By 0900 Company A had reached the foot of the high cliff and was stopped by rifle fire coming from the underground air-raid shelter.

Information had reached the Battalion that General Erxleben, the German General charged with the defense of Kassel and the surrounding towns, and his entire Staff had been trapped in the underground shelter. Every man was eager to see the German General.

Soon a white flag appeared at one of the shelter entrances, and the German Commander came out to ask for a truce. He wanted time to evacuate civilians and wounded from Kassel. However, his request was refused, and a surrender ultimatum was delivered to him. This ultimatum stipulated that he was to surrender his entire garrison unconditionally within 15 minutes or firing would be resumed. (49)

The hopelessness of the situation was obvious to General Erxleben, and he surrendered within the allotted time.

About 3,000 people came out of the underground tunnels. Of that number, about half were civilians. The rest were German soldiers, Volkstrum, and old men; normally fire guards, who had been pressed into action. Many of these soldiers had never had a rifle in their hands before. (50)

These prisoners brought the total for our 1st Battalion up to approximately 2,500 for the four days of fighting. (51)

(47) A-6; (48) Personal knowledge; (49) A-6 and Personal knowledge; (50) A-7
(51) A-6.

At 1245 the City of Kassel was officially surrendered, and by 1400 elements of the 318th Infantry had completely covered the town. (52)

Orders were soon received by the 1st Battalion to relieve elements of the 319th Infantry in the new part of Kassel that lies east of the Fulda River. This relief was completed by 1800 on 4 April, 1945, and the 1st Battalion remained in that area until the next day, when we were relieved by elements of the 69th Infantry Division. (53)

During the day the 2nd Battalion, 318th Infantry, had continued to mop-up in the northern part of the city west of the Fulda River. At the time of the surrender, they had advanced south along the west side of the river until contact had been made with 1st Battalion near the cliff. (54)

The 3rd Battalion, 318th Infantry, had completed its mission of attacking east through the center of the city and was on top of the underground shelter looking down into the Fulda River when fighting ceased. They had established contact with elements of the 1st and 2nd Battalions at that point. (55)

The 317th Infantry had completed the encirclement of the city during the day, and was poised along the west bank of the Fulda River north of Kassel. They had repulsed several enemy counterattacks during the day, and by late afternoon were engaged in manning road blocks and approaches to the city from the north. (56)

The 319th Infantry had established contact with 2nd Battalion, 318th Infantry, at the bridge across the Fulda River early in the morning of 4 April, and by late afternoon had been relieved by 1st Battalion, 318th Infantry, in the new part of Kassel on the east side of the river. (57)

Active patrolling and mopping-up was continued during the late afternoon and night of 4 April by the 318th Infantry. There were still some isolated groups of Germans that had been by-passed during the day, and these groups were being systematically cleared up. (58)

(52) A-6; (53) A-1, p. 10; (54) A-1, p. 10; (55) A-6 and A-7; (56) A-6
(57) A-1, p. 10; (58) A-6.

With the capture of Kassel, many critical military installations and vital industrial plants had fallen to the 80th Infantry Division, and the enemy had been denied further use of the city as a key road and rail center. During the four days of bitter fighting in and around the city, the three infantry regiments, 317th, 318th, and 319th, had taken a total of 5,488 prisoners of war, including one German Army Commander. In addition to this total of prisoners, hundreds had been killed in the bitter fighting. (59)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISMS

In analyzing this operation it is apparent that the 80th Infantry Division was assigned an important mission. The 318th Infantry was given the very difficult task of making the direct assault on Kassel.

From the beginning we knew that the element of surprise would be lacking. The Germans had known for days that a spearhead was being directed towards Kassel, and by the time we reached the outskirts of the City, the defenders had road blocks and strong points established in our path.

In comparing the strength of the troops defending the city with the strength of the troops actually designated to assault the city proper, it will be seen that our forces were vastly outnumbered. The Germans had concentrations of tanks to support their infantry, and this gave them an additional advantage in armor and mobile striking power.

However, our lack of numerical equality was compensated for by the high degree of morale and discipline apparent throughout the entire operation. The men in the 1st Battalion demonstrated this when they were called upon to fight for almost four days and nights with little or no rest. The Officers and leaders in all echelons of command can be commended for the manner in which their units performed.

The plan of attack of the 80th Infantry Division was tactically sound. Fire and maneuver was the general plan of attack. At Division level, the 318th Infantry was employed in the main effort on the south, while the 317th Infantry and 319th Infantry were used to encircle Kassel from both flanks. At Regimental level, the 1st Battalion was employed in the main effort on the south, while the 2nd Battalion and 3rd Battalion were used to encircle the enemy from the west and northwest. At Battalion level, Company C was employed in the main effort on the south, while Company A and Company B were sent around to the west to encircle the enemy holding up our advance along the railroad embankment.

All orders issued during the attack on Kassel were clear, complete and concise, and the members of the 1st Battalion were kept fully informed of the situation at all times.

More armor should have been available to the 80th Infantry Division in reducing Kassel. It will be recalled that the 6th Armored Division was diverted from the attack on Kassel just as it approached the city from the south and was turned east to attack Erfurt and Weimar.

The Tank Destroyer Platoons were too close together. They were not taking normal precautions against surprise attacks when they were fired on by the enemy and disabled.

The 1st Battalion should not have been forced to fight so long without the direct support of Tank Destroyers and Antitank guns. These weapons were lost early in the fighting and were not replaced until the battle for Kassel was over.

LESSONS LEARNED

There are many lessons to be learned from this operation and some of them are:

1. Overconfidence and carelessness are costly in personnel and equipment. The Battalion was deprived of its maximum fighting efficiency when

we lost highly trained personnel as well as their vehicles and guns, and in this instance replacements were not readily available.

2. Tanks should have infantry support at all times. Tanks are vulnerable to antitank as well as to rifle grenade fire and must have infantry in close support to protect them.

3. Medium Artillery fire can be effectively employed against heavy armor. On two different occasions, we were forced to call upon medium Artillery fire to help break up enemy tank attacks; and in both instances direct hits were scored, immobilizing them completely.

4. The "Bazooka" is more effective against tanks than the 37mm Antitank Gun. On one occasion a German tank was disabled with a single round from the "Bazooka", and upon examining the tank we found that five hits from the 37mm gun had failed to penetrate the armor or disable the tank.

5. Fire and maneuver are the basic elements of any well planned attack. We were repeatedly stopped by the enemy in well organized defensive positions, and it was necessary to flank the positions in neutralizing them.

6. Once initiative and momentum are gained, constant pressure must be maintained. Since we were outnumbered, it is believed that the enemy was defeated primarily because they were given no chance to withdraw, reorganize and regroup their forces.

7. Commanders must not attempt to conduct operations by themselves. Leadership is the ability to instill confidence in others and not a demonstration of personal bravery or of personal fighting ability. In his eagerness to influence the action, our Battalion Commander took personal charge of the crew of the Battalion Antitank Gun at the barracks, and consequently was trapped for a considerable period of time. Battalion Commanders are too valuable to their outfits to take such chances.